
DCS BULLETIN

DIVISION OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
(701) 328-2094

APRIL 2000

Renaissance Zone Program In Full Swing

It took over seven months and a lot of hard work by the Division of Community Services (DCS) and Office of the State Tax Commissioner's staff, but we did it. We completed and published a Renaissance Zone Program statement and a Renaissance Zone Tax Incentive guide. Both of these can be accessed through the DCS website at www.state.nd.us/dcs.

On December 28, 1999, the first Renaissance Zone was designated in Fargo, ND. Currently DCS is reviewing three applications from other cities.

Only two other states have a similar program, but North Dakota's law is not as specific and is not competitive, although the evaluation criteria are for a competitive program. These two factors made it very

challenging to structure a meaningful program. We did not want to make it too difficult to apply, but at the same time we needed to make sure that if tax exemptions and credits are approved, that they will truly benefit the entire city and that the city's Renaissance Zone fits well into the overall plans for the city.

The first hurdle we are finding is that many cities may have a problem with meeting the first program requirement of having an adopted current comprehensive or strategic plan. This is a must. One of the evaluation criteria in the law is how a Renaissance Zone designation would relate to a broader plan for the community as a whole. Without an adopted current plan, the city has no way of providing a narrative discussion and DCS is unable to do its evaluation.



*From the Desk of
Rich Gray*

The second thing we are finding is that more time needs to be devoted to determining and developing local project selection criteria. We are (cont. on page 3)

IDIS Goes Live

The Division of Community Services (DCS) went live on IDIS (Integrated Disbursement Information System) on April 6, 2000. IDIS is a main frame system developed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to effectively manage the Community Planning and Development funded programs. The system is designed to provide program participants and HUD staff members with financial management, information reporting and performance monitoring capa-

bilities. This means HUD has access to the State's information all the time and not just once per year when DCS submits its annual report. IDIS affects the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Program and Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) Program.

The information that was uploaded into the IDIS system by HUD was minimal. Because of this, the DCS had to suspend all activities in the CDBG, HOME and ESG Programs

effective March 27, 2000. This means DCS was unable to pay request for funds, review application/business plans or issue financial awards. The DCS Staff worked diligently for a period of time to verify information, balance dollars, input information and fund grants.

Our goal was to have IDIS in operation by April 24, 2000. We cut this goal short by one week; IDIS became operational on April 17, 2000.

Is Your Community Ready for the Challenges and Opportunities of the New Millennium?

The face of rural North Dakota is changing and community leaders will continue to play an important role in that change.

Michael Spletto, point of contact for the Leadership Initiative for Community Strategic Planning process, says that the main missing ingredient to assist community leaders in preparing for this change was a "simple and flexible" single strategic planning model. A model was then developed that communities of all sizes could use to meet these challenges head on. The model reduces the need for communities to complete strategic plans for most agencies requiring a plan for funding purposes, and helps point the community in the direction it chooses as its future.

In November 1998, a group of development agencies and entities representing communities met and discussed concerns of communities in the State of North Dakota. Most of the concerns were similar, ranging from the poor agricultural economy to the out-migration of the state's

population. The group members agreed that a single strategic planning process would meet the needs of most of the parties involved.

Spletto says that this process has a couple of unique features that other strategic plans do not have. The process has the involvement and support from nearly 30 organizations representing local government, state government, federal government and private organizations. All of these entities have signed off on a memorandum of understanding and have agreed to provide necessary resources to help this process. These resources range from technical and financial assistance to facilitation expertise for this process. Several individuals have already been trained to help this process, and annually additional facilitation training will take place.

Dina Butcher, DCS Director, says that this is not an unfunded government mandate and funds have already been secured to help in this process. Starting in year 2000, nearly \$250,000 is being made available

from the DCS to assist this process. The North Dakota Association of Regional Councils has also secured \$110,000 from the Economic Development Administration to assist in this process. Even with several State and Federal programs requiring planning or recommend planning as a prerequisite for limited funds, Spletto says this should not be the reason communities plan. Communities need to create a vision of their future and develop a road map of how they can reach their future, he says.

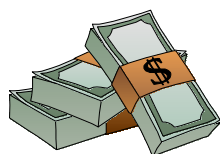
The program will be available soon. Initially, three communities are piloting the process and they should be completed in the spring of 2000. First round applications were accepted through April 16 by DCS and a second round of applications will begin after that on a first-come-first-served basis.

The DCS has been designated as the point of contact for this process. For more information, call Michael Spletto at 328-2094 or go to the DCS web site www.state.nd.us/dcs.

Patience Pays Off

In May 1999, the Division of Community Services (DCS) took a shot in the dark by applying funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development under the Community Development Block Grant Technical Assistance program. It was a shot in the dark because these funds typically go to entities other than states.

DCS staff decided to pursue funding through the Region VIII office of



HUD in Denver, which was allocated \$83,580 for this competitive grant program. The DCS application was fairly large, and intended to help pay for training and technical assistance costs associated with the Leadership Initiative for Community Strategic Planning.

That was last May and successful grantees were expected to be notified last fall, but that time passed

and expectations diminished. On March 1, 2000, however, DCS was notified that \$33,580 was awarded. HUD appears interested in how this process can be replicated in other states. Tasks remain. DCS staff must still redo the budget and develop a Technical Assistance Delivery Plan for approval by HUD before May 31, 2000. Staff point out that the real beneficiaries of this grant will be the cities and counties who work with the DCS to undertake strategic planning.

Doing "e-business" with DCS

As most of you know DCS's web page has been "on-line" for some time now. But have you checked out some of the new items:



- ◆ Renaissance Zone
- ◆ State Building Code
- ◆ CDBG Forms & Links
- ◆ HOME Forms
- ◆ News Flashes

Click your way to the latest news/information on the new and improved DCS web page www.state.nd.us/dcs.

Some interesting "tidbits" about DCS web page:

- ◆ Over 150 hits per day
- ◆ Over 5,000 hits per month
- ◆ Almost 400 files downloaded monthly

If you think DCS should add/change their web page, email Darin Scherr dscherr@state.nd.us or call him at (701) 328-1022.

DCS Service Awards

Last December, the following DCS staff members received service awards, to acknowledge years of service with the state:



Susan Erdle, Administrative Assistant - 15 years
 Denise Faber, Administrative Clerk - 10 years
 Richard Gray, Program Manager - 20 years
 Sherry Leno, CDBG Program Administrator - 20 years
 Bonnie Malo, CDBG Program Manager - 10 years
 Lori Nitsch, Grants & Contracts Officer - 5 years
 Howard Sage, Weatherization Program Manager - 20 years
 Krislyn Thompson, Account/Budget Specialist - 15 years

DCS Welcomes Anderson

The Division of Community Services welcomes Peggy Anderson who has recently accepted a position as Administrative Secretary.

She had previously been employed with Aetna US Healthcare.

She is a Napoleon native and graduated from Valley City State University.



*Peggy Anderson
Administrative Secretary*

Renaissance Zone Program (Cont. page 1)

also finding that cities are including a provision to waive criteria. Potential beneficiaries need to be able to clearly understand how a city intends to approve or disapprove projects. The citizens also need to know this so they are assured that the state and the city are approving the most beneficial projects. The zone authority also needs to be clear on its criteria in order to assure consistency with the goals and objectives of the zone and the city overall. While some criteria are more important than

others, it is not satisfactory to simply waive everything. If a city finds that its project selection criteria needs to be changed or modified, we will entertain amendments.

The Renaissance Zone program is first and foremost a community development program that uses tax incentives to achieve desired goals and objectives for the entire city. Since the program can and will affect both state and local taxes, great care needs to be

exercised in determining what activities will take place, and in assuring that those activities benefit more than just the individual taxpayer. To manage a zone with any less attention to its main purpose of community development will be a loss to everyone. The DCS is committed to making sure that zone designations are based on well thought out and designed Development Plans, and that these plans truly focus on the overall plans of the applicant city.

ADAAG Conformance Statement_____

Seven years ago the Legislature enacted a law (NDCC Chapter 54-21.3-04.1) that officially recognized the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) as the accessibility standards for all buildings subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This law requires state agencies and governing bodies of political subdivisions to "require from any person preparing plans and specifications for a building or facility subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, a statement that the plans and specifications are, in the professional judgement of that person, in conformance with the

Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities."

In January 1994, we sent to every city and county a copy of a state form entitled "ADAAG Conformance Statement." We have recently updated this form and will be sending it to each city and county. Typically the form is completed by the person who prepared the plans and specifications at the time a building permit is taken out. The original is retained by the state agency or political subdivision, and a copy is sent to the DCS.

For more information, contact Richard Gray at 328-3698.

Earth Day 2000_____

Nearly a hundred state employees in the Capitol Complex marked Earth Day celebrations, by participating in a Bike or Walk to Work Day.



earth day
2000

Participants received free refreshments, a compact fluorescent light bulb, and were eligible to win T-shirts in a drawing.

The event was sponsored by the following agencies:

- ✧ Governor's Office
- ✧ NDDCS State Energy Office
- ✧ Department of Health
- ✧ Council of State Employees

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